

QUICK INFORMATION SERIES

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
FOREIGN MISSION SOCIETY****BURMA****1. The Country**

BURMA, the largest province of British India, is situated south of Assam and Tibet, between China and Siam on the east and the Bay of Bengal on the west. In area it is equal to New England and the Middle States, together with Ohio and Indiana. Its population, now estimated at 10,000,000, is constantly increasing.

Characteristics

"Burma is the banner province of the British Empire, the brightest jewel in the royal diadem. There flows the Irrawadi, with great ships upon its waters. It has forests of precious teak, mines of valuable metals, but best of all are its unfailing agricultural resources. There are no famines in Burma, but her staple product, rice, forms a vast and unfailing storehouse from which the starving peninsular people of India are fed. A million and a half tons of rice, worth \$60,000,000, are annually exported from Burma."

2. The People

There are over forty different racial divisions, but the short, thick-set, active Burmese comprise more than one half of the population. They are impulsive, fond of fun and laughter, and much given to shows of all kinds. Next in number come the Shans and Karens; all of these were originally hill people, though now many of the latter live in the plains. The Karens have a great fondness for music; and the Shans have a peculiar aptness for trading.

3. Religions

Buddhism

claims as adherents 6,000,000 of the inhabitants of Burma. Pagodas crown every eminence; shrines and monasteries are in every city. The greatest of these, the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon, was recently regilded at a cost of \$1,000,000, a striking proof that the faith is still firmly entrenched in the hearts of the people. They know no personal God; salvation is by good works; and *nirvana*, non-existence, is the Buddhist conception of heaven.

Spirit Worship

Some of the tribes, notably the Karens and the Kachins, are not Buddhists nor idolators, but spirit worshipers; that is, by their sacrifices they seek to appease the evil spirits, and so avoid the harm they might inflict.

The Karens have some interesting traditions, and their stories of the creation, the fall of man, and the flood are strikingly like the Bible accounts. They said that their ancestors had the "Book of God," and they were looking for the white man to bring the book again. These things made them much more ready to listen to the gospel when it was offered to them.

Other Religions

Considerable numbers of people from southern and western India have settled in Burma, and, of course, practise the rites of Hinduism and Mohammedanism. There are over 50,000 Mohammedans in Rangoon alone.

4. Origin of the Mission

An Unexpected Call

The steps that led Baptists to take up mission work in Burma show some of the most wonderful leadings of God's providence. On February 6, 1812, at Salem, Mass., five young men were ordained as missionaries to India, under the auspices of the American Board (Congregationalist). One of these was Adoniram Judson who, with his wife, Ann Hasseltine, sailed for India a few days later. In January, 1813, the surprising news reached Boston that Judson, by the independent study of the New Testament, had been led to accept Baptist views, and that he had been immersed in Cal-

cutta. In a letter to Dr. Thomas Baldwin he said, "Should there be formed a Baptist society for the support of a mission in these parts, I should be ready to consider myself their missionary."

Organization

This glad news flew swiftly. Baptists were aroused, encouraged and united. A meeting was called, and on May 21, 1814, at Philadelphia the Triennial Convention was organized, which later became the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society. Thus was laid the corner-stone of Baptist unity in America, and the first act of the new organization was to assume the support of Judson and the work in Burma.

5. Early Trials and Heroism

When Judson went to Burma it was not a British province, but a land of savage tribes ruled by a cruel king, hostile to all foreigners. This caused many trials and much suffering to the early missionaries. When trouble arose with the British the Burmans cast Judson and Dr. Price into prison. Their sufferings were intense, and but for the ceaseless care and devotion of Mrs. Judson they must have perished.

Progress

In spite of all afflictions the missionaries persevered, and after a time converts began to be received. The Burman Bible, the manuscript of which was at one time concealed in an old pillow to save it from destruction, was completed in 1834. So accurate was it that very little revision has since been necessary.

The Karens

Ko Thah Byu, the robber chief, Judson's Karen servant, was baptized in 1828. He became a remarkable evangelist, and led many of his people to Christ. Our most successful work has been among the Karens, thousands of whom have been gathered into prosperous churches.

Other Tribes

Besides work for the Burmans and Karens, missions are conducted among the Shans, Chins, Kachins, Talains, Eurasians, Telugus and Tamils, and by means of many different dialects touch nearly all of the peoples and tribes included in the population.

6. Development

We can now look back upon nearly one hundred years of mission work in this country. What of the results? From one point of view it appears that there remains yet "much land to be possessed." On the other hand, when we consider the marvelous changes which have come in Burma, and the mighty forces, social, political and religious, which are at work today undermining the very foundations of heathenism, we praise God for what our eyes have seen and for what they are yet to behold in the near future.

A strong evangelistic spirit pervades the churches and leads them constantly to reach out to the regions beyond. There are Christian homes of two and three generations, and Christian churches, large and small, some of which have fine church buildings erected by native contributions. There is a thoroughly organized Christian educational system, from jungle school to theological seminary, including the only Christian college in Burma. Medical mission work also has been established, and the problem of self-support, which has been successfully solved in some fields, is being earnestly studied in all. The present ingathering among the tribes on the Chinese border offers a new and almost limitless prospect of expansion towards the east.

An Appreciation

Rev. Julius Smith, a missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church, gives the following testimony to our work:

"The greatest missionary labors in Burma have been wrought by American Baptists. From Adoniram Judson until the present generation of missionaries there has been an increasing force of faithful and heroic men and women who have devoted their lives to the redemption of Burma. It is only safe to say that the work of all other societies combined would not equal that done by the Baptists."

Contributions for the work of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society may be sent to any of the District Secretaries, or to the Treasurer, Box 41, Boston, Mass.

Address the Literature Department, American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Box 41, Boston, Mass., for the following:—

Extra copies of this leaflet. Price per doz., 5 cents; per hundred, 25 cents.

"Missions in Burma," an historical sketch. Price, 15 cents.

"Harvest Time at Kengtung." Price, 3 cents.

Catalog of Publications. Free.

Handbook of the Foreign Mission Society. Price, 20 cents.

Annual Report of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society. Free, on receipt of 8 cents for postage.
